

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0000.06 : Tape 6**

Melvyn Goldstein, Editor

**Center for Research on Tibet
Department of Anthropology**

and

**Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio**

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Location of Interview: Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China

Date of Interview: 21 June 1993

Language of Interview: Tibetan

Interviewed by: Melvyn Goldstein and Tashi Tsering

Name: Setrong Wangye [Tib. gser grong dbang rgyal]

Gender: Male

Age: circa 73

Date of Birth: circa 1920

Abstract

Setrong Wangye was a member of a rich shungyupa (government taxpayer) family [Tib. gshung rgyugs pa] in Tülung [Tib. stod lung] district. His family had large land holdings with its own miser [Tib. mi ser] or bound peasants/serfs and also held the position of Gyatso gembo [Tib. rgya mtsho rgan po] for the district. He discusses the Lhasa People's Association as well as an excellent discussion of the traditional system of land and taxes with respect to the aristocratic and religious estates and their bound peasants in the old society, including examples of law cases.

Tape 6

Q: I want to ask you about taxes in the old society. Before starting this, I am not clear about something I asked you about last time. You had heard something about how Gyüme [Tib. rgyud smad] [Tantric College] gave the equivalent of 2,000 khe of barley to the People's Association, but you never said from where you heard that? So where did you hear that?

A: At that time, I didn't know whether the People's Association was good or bad. My late older brother used to tell me a lot that I should not meddle in that. But I had done a little bit of research on the association, so I heard about it that way. However, I don't have anything to tell you about a particular person or any proof to tell you.

Q: Can you explain how the taxes were collected in the old society when you were the official? Mainly, and first of all, how did you collect the taxes? You collected the taxes and you also had to pay taxes to Dechen district [Tib. bde chen rdzong], like the horse corvée tax, right?

A: Regarding the Gyüme Tantric College, at that time, I was in my 30s and I was kind of smart. So I had done some research about whether the People's Association was good or bad and whether they could work out something. There was something that had a reason. Lukhangwa [Tib. klu khang ba] was the Acting Prime Minister, the Sitsab, and he was the Tsondzin, [Tib. 'tsho 'dzin] [the guardian appointed to assist Gyüme]. Last time, I didn't remember that. The Tsondzin was like the advisor [Ch. gu wen], a person to whom they could ask for advice.

For example, the Tsondzin of Drepung Loseling [Tib. blo gsal gling] was the Kalön Lama Tempa Jayang [Tib. bstan pa 'jam dbyangs]. They used to ask better aristocrats to become their Tsondzin. Normally, they don't ask them about the minor things, but when they have some major matter, they would seek advice from the Tsondzin. So they would not search for this person indiscriminately, they would search for a person who could give advice with regard to the present and the future, and who could see the front side as well as the back side of issues.

At that time, we all knew that the people in charge of the People's Association didn't have much economic wealth [themselves], but they spent a lot of money on giving alms to the monks at the Mönlam [Tib. smon lam] Festival and they also made some offerings. I myself was wondering how they could get so much money because they didn't have that kind of economic condition themselves. Therefore, I inquired about how they got the things to spend. Then I heard from the society that Gyüme College had helped them. So I thought that the reason for that was certainly because Lukhangwa was the Tsondzin of Gyüme College and also the Sitsab. The Lama Gyüpa will definitely listen to an order from the Sitsab and I knew clearly that the Sitsab was conservative [Tib. klad pa ljang gu]. So there was a reason for me to think that. It wasn't that I just trusted some rumors that I heard from the alleys.

As for the taxes, at that time, there were miser who belonged to the Tibetan Government, the aristocrats and to the religious entities [Tib. gzhung sger chos gsum]. The aristocratic estates had a little bit of taxes to collect and they had their miser who they could make do the work. They had a complete thing. The aristocratic and religious estates had their land based on the unit called dön [Tib. 'don]. It was equal to two gang [Tib. rkang] in size, but they had to pay taxes or provide labor for only one gang.

Q: How many khe of seed was there in one gang?

A: It is not certain or fixed. When we were working in the archives [Ch. dang an guan], they had inquired about that. The number of khe of seed used for one gang was not the same in all parts of Tibet. Generally speaking, it was about 60 khe of seed for a gang so one dön was 120 khe of seed.

Q: Was that the average?

A: Yes, something like that. At that time, I had one gang of land as the basis for working as the Gyatso Gembo [Tib. rgya tsho rgan po] and it had about 60 khe of seed. So I think this was the average.

Q: Wasn't the land basis of the miser of the aristocratic and religious estates also called tregang [Tib. khral rgang] or treten [Tib. khral rten]? The government was saying that one dön is two gang and a gang had 60 khe of seed. But I think the miser's tregang was smaller than that, right?

A: It was much smaller. For example, there was an estate called Gyatö [Tib. rgya stod] that belonged to Kündeling located east of my home. That estate had 7 gang and the taxes were divided between 11-12 households of miser who were just given 10-15 khe of seed for each [of their] tregang. Down from us there was another estate that belonged to Kündeling called Santsam [Tib. sa mtshams]. It had 8 gang. So these two estates had 15 gang. So Santsam Estate had about 20 some miser households and they divided the taxes to the miser and some had 1 gang, or half of a gang or two thirds of gang or three fourths of a gang. They said that the miser had to work for one gang for the chitre and one gang for the nangtre. The nangtre involved for sending one person to do the farming for the estate. The chitre meant doing work for the taxes imposed by the local government. These two taxes were called the taxes in-kind and in labor or "gangdro langdon" [Tib. rgang 'gro lag 'don]. Doing labor meant sending pack animals for transporting goods and people to work whenever they were called.

In the upper part of Tölung Dechen, there were 61 gang that had been working for taxes permanently. When 100 pack animals were called, each gang have to send a little less than two pack animals. At that time, when they calculated the number of loads, it was counted as fractions like one third and two thirds. 6 phul was counted as one gang. 6 phul was 1 dre, and 20 dre was 1 khe.

It was said clearly in the fraction [Tib. cha phran] that a fraction of 240 is half [Tib. nyis brgya bzhi bcu'i cha la phyed]. This was a very accurate math system where even a single grain could be counted. Regarding this, I used to tell the Cultural Education Bureau [Ch. wen jiao ju], "When the pebbles, broken porcelain, twigs and peach seeds were poured, people might think that it was kind of primitive thing, but it was very accurate. You should do research on that."

At that time, the miser were counting the number of tregang very precisely because they were obliged to work for the taxes [based on this]. So if there were 200 loads it was divided into 61 gang, so each gang would get one load and one fourth of a load [actually 3.3 loads]. When they gathered there, it was easy to divide when it was 1 gang or a half, but it was very difficult to divide when they had fractions like one third, one fourth and one fifth. But the taxpayer miser could easily do that math because they were accustomed to it. There were very few of them who had one tregang for one household.

Normally, the aristocratic estates would give their miser different amounts of fields according to their own wishes. The government would never meddle into this matter. That's how all the taxpayer households became poor. But we, the shungyupa households were not same. We originally had nine and one third tregang. We had to give one tregang to another household, so then we had eight and one third tregang. There were no other households like us working taxes for eight and one third tregang [this was huge] in the whole of Dongkar [Tib. gdong dkar] and Liu [Tib. sne'u].

If you look at this all of a sudden, there was a great contradiction. Last time, I told you that the bigger aristocrats had over 100 dön. That meant over 200 gang, right? I may say that my family was big, but compared to them [the larger aristocratic estates], it wasn't big at all because I had only eight and one third tregang. As I mentioned above, the aristocratic and religious estates [typically] divided the land and the taxes to many small households.

As I told you last time, I had 12 miser households who didn't have to work for the outer taxes or chitre. They only had to do the corvée farming for us. In case we had to send them to do work for the chitre tax or with their pack animals, we would give them tsamba, tea, and butter and a little bit of meat.

This was the main difference between the miser of the aristocratic estates and the shungyupa. We didn't have any taxes to collect from our miser. We gave them the land as the basis for working for the inner corvée nangtre. They didn't need to pay any lease fee to us for this land. In addition to that, they were given some lands on a lease basis for which they had to work for the taxes. This was called "leased land for doing taxes" [Tib. khral rgyab bogs zhing]. We collected one khe of lease fee from one khe of seed planted.

Q: When your miser came to work for corvée labor, did you call that gangdro?

A: It could be regarded as a gangdro, but it was called it nangtre.

Q: Did they call it nangtre when the miser of Kündeling worked for the estate?

A: Yes. It was called nangtre and the taxes imposed by the local government were called chitre.

Q: The miser of Kündeling had to work for both, the nangtre and chitre, right?

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of chitre tax did the miser of the Kündeling have to do?

A: At that time, there was a proverb in Tibet saying, "The taxes were like number of hairs and the wrinkles [ripples] of the water" [Tib. skra'i grangs ka chu'i gnyer ma]. It means that they were countless so the miser will not know what kind of taxes they were going to impose.

At the time of the democratic reforms when the miser held the struggle sessions against the serf owners, they said that the taxes were imposed casually [Tib. da ga se]. But actually they were given lands and it was made into a tregang and the taxes were imposed according to the tregang. The taxes were not imposed indiscriminately or recklessly, like when someone passing by just said, "Come on! Do this and that."

Q: Nobody will do that, right?

A: Yes. They will say that I won't do that because there should be a basis [in land] for that.

Q: For example, when they originally made up the tregang, if Kündeling gave their miser 10 khe of seed for one tregang would it have been possible that Surkhang would have given 20 khe of seed for one tregang to their miser?

A: This was possible because we gave 12 khe of seed only for the nangtre. But they didn't have the 12 khe basis for both the nangtre and the chitre. The aristocratic and religious estates were not same at all, because there wasn't any decision made by the government. They were just doing things based on their own wishes.

Q: Were there two different kinds of miser at Kündeling; some working for the nangtre and some working for the chitre?

A: No. One family had to work for both the nangtre and the chitre. For example, it was like I am saying, "I have one gang for the nangtre and one gang for the chitre."

Q: So if a person had the land, they had to work both the nangtre and the chitre, right?

A: Yes.

Q: If someone had only one gang for the nangtre, then they didn't need to work for the chitre, right?

A: No.

A: If a miser of Kündeling was given 10 khe of land for one gang, they had to work for one gang for the nangtre on the estate and they also had to work for one gang for the chitre imposed by the local government, right?

A: Yes.

Q: The difference was that your miser only had to work for the nangtre and you did the work for the chitre, right?

A: Yes. Whenever a tax came down from the local government, I or my older brother would go to take care of it. It was because, on the one hand, we were the Gyatso Gembo, and on the other hand, we ourselves had to work doing a lot of taxes. Then we had to arrange how many trenyog and pack animals we should send and we had to divide the taxes.

As for the aristocratic and religious estates, the estate that belonged to Kündeling, for example, had 7 tregang. They had set up a headman who would go there and bring back the information regarding the taxes and he would call all the treba taxpayers and divide the taxes. The estate steward would never go for the taxes.

Q: If Kündeling had to pay 100 khe of barley to the government as their chitre, did the estate pay that or did the miser have to pay that?

A: The money and the barley taxes were taken care of by the Kündeling Labrang. The miser couldn't handle to pay that much. They didn't have that amount to pay. At that time, it was called, "the civil and military taxes that should be paid in-kind and in labor" [Tib. zhi drag rkang 'gro lag 'don]. If the estate that belonged to Kündeling was obliged to send 1-2 soldiers for the Trapchi [Tib. grwa bzhi] Regiment which was also called the "The Chinese Trained Regiment" [Tib. rgya sbyong dmag sgar], the Labrang took care of sending the soldiers. The miser didn't have to do anything. The Labrang had to send the people and give them food and clothing.

Q: So the miser of Kündeling just had to work for the estate and they also had to send the transportation corvée animals for the government. Otherwise, they didn't need to pay barley and stuff like skins and cow dung, right?

A: Yes. They didn't need to pay much for the taxes because they didn't have the means to pay that. At that time, there were some people who took the estate of Kündeling as a lease for a couple of years and then left it. They were just hoping to get some profit.

The aristocratic estates were also like the religious estates [like Kündeling]. For example, the aristocratic families called Ringang [Tib. rin sgang], Seshim [Tib. zas zhim], and Changöpa [Tib. bya dngos pa] were in Tülung [Tib. stod lung]. Changöpa was one of the small lords who had only about 4 dön and a few miser. Changöpa had a headman who took responsibility for the taxes and divided the taxes among the miser. The miser of the aristocrats also have to work for the estate just like the miser that belonged to

the monasteries.

Q: I heard that each aristocratic family had only one Shabten Phashi [Tib. zhabs rten pha gzhis][the estate from which the obligation to provide an official to the government derives]--and they didn't need to pay or work for taxes for that estate, right?

A: Yes, that's right. There were "Four types of tax exemptions" [Tib. chag chen bzhi]; the first was called Shabdö Ngochag. This was the tax exemption for the officials of the Tibetan Government [Tib. zhabs sdod ngo chag]. If there was one lay official serving the government, they were totally exempted for paying or working for taxes for one dön of land. If the lay official got old and died and if there were no children to work as the official, then they had to pay barley and money to the local government for one dön.

Q: That was kind of the substitute [Tib. dod] for the tax, right?

A: Yes. For example, in Tülung, there was the Seshim Estate and below that there was an estate called Trakhug [Tib. brag khug] that belonged to a monk official. Later the monk official died and the family had two daughters who were broadcast announcers. The family had a son who became a monk official. The younger ones in the family were 3-4 daughters. After the monk official died, the daughters couldn't serve as officials so the local government gave their estate to Dzasa Ngawang Gyentsen [Tib. ngag dbang rgyal mtshan]. They lost the estate because there were no officials serving the government. Seshim was an aristocrat who had a famous wife [Tib. lcam] in our times.

Q: There was a son of Seshim, right?

A: Yes. He was the one who was taking opium and was called Pemala. I played majong with him many times and we were very friendly. Poor thing! He didn't get a good back door relation and he was unable to become a lay official. He went through the motions of going to the Tsikhang, but he wasn't able to succeed to be a Tsitrugpa (the Official Trainee [Tib. rtsis phrug pa]). When they didn't have a lay official serving the government, the local government took back their estate and gave it to Yabshi Tagtser [Tib. yab gzhis stag 'tsher].

Dzasa Ngawang Gyentsen, whom I just mentioned, was also called Dzasa Gyatag [rgya stag (sp.?)]. He used to be famous and had his estate that was called the Gyatag Estate near Gepo [Tib. gad po]. The 13th Dalai Lama gave the Gyatag Estate to the engineer [Ch. gong cheng shi] called Chenmo Karmala [Tib. chen mo skar ma lags] as a bonus for building the Jensal [Tib. spyan bsal] Palace in Norbulinga. After the engineer died, since he had only a few daughters and didn't have a son, the local government took the estate back and gave it to Dzasa Gyatag.

Q: Some of the aristocrats had more estates in addition to their Shabten Phashi. When there were no officials serving for the government, could the government take back the other additional estates?

A: They didn't particularly mention the the Shabten Phashi. It was just generally said that the taxes for one dön were exempted because they served the government.

The smallest aristocrat was called Gerpa Takyang [Tib. sger pa rta rkyang]. He had only one dön of land. The aristocrats who were a little bit better than that like Changöpa, had 4 dön. From these, the taxes for one dön were exempted because they sent a family member as a government official. But at that time, it appeared that the local (Tibetan) government didn't make many changes [in ownership] for the old government official families [even when they didn't have officials serving]. But that was also not certain. However, it would take just a moment for the local Tibetan government to make changes for the small aristocrats. However, they couldn't change the big aristocratic families who had over 100 dön in estates in Lhoka, in Tsang [Tib. gtsang], in Tö [Tib. stod], in Phenpo, and everywhere.

Q: Were the aristocrats allowed to sell their estates?

A: Yes, they were allowed. However, they were doing this kind of inconspicuously. They were taking into consideration the bad reputation they would get if they did this, with other people saying that they sold their estate. At that time, estate sellers were regarded as very bad. There were some people who sold their estates surreptitiously to repay their loans.

Q: For example, If I sold my estate to Tashila because I was short of money and he bought it but he was not an aristocrat, how would it work out?

A: If the estate was small, they would just tell a lie and say that it was being leased. Probably, people never said that they had sold it. So it seemed that it was kind of not allowed to sell estates. However, houses were sold in Lhasa.

Q: For example, the aristocrat Nyelungwa could sell his house in Lhasa, but they were not allowed to sell their estate, right?

A: Yes, probably they were not allowed to sell the estate.

Q: The first question is whether or not estates were allowed to be sold as a right of the aristocrat. The second question is, in case they sold an estate, under what kind of circumstance or conditions were they allowed to sell it?

A: I have never seen people selling and buying estates. It seems that it was kind of not allowed, but I don't have anything to tell you that there were such and such restrictions that it was not allowed to be sold.

Q: I heard that Trimön [Tib. khri smon] sold or offered his estate to Kündeling, and Kündeling paid a kind of salary to him and his new wife until he died, right?

A: That's right.

Q: I think it was kind of sold, right?

A: Yes, it was kind of sold, but not really sold.

Q: I think that Kündeling kept the estate till they were eliminated [died]?

A: That was not certain. I have a little bit to tell you regarding Trimön. I heard that all of the estates that belonged to Trimön were offered to Kündeling and in turn Kündeling supplied monthly alloments of tsamba, flour, butter, tea, and all the things for the Ex-Kalön Trimön, his wife, his old steward [Tib. mgron gnyer] and several maid-servants. Altogether that included about 10-15 people.

At that time, there were some small shops near Trimön House. I heard that the Trimön's wife was a very strange woman. As soon as she got the foodstuffs from Kündeling, she used to give a lot of those things to other aristocrats, friends and relatives, so at the end of month, her foodstuffs would run out, right?.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said:] I am not sure about this, but I have seen the Lady Trimön wearing a lot of make up.

A: Yes. At that time, when Trimön and his wife would go shopping, I used to follow them when I was a child. When they got inside the shops, his wife would call her husband Kundün [Tib. sku mdun]. We heard from people that she was calling her husband Kundün which was usually what we called the Dalai Lama. So I used to follow them to find out whether she was saying that or not and she indeed said that. At the end of the month, Trimön's wife would run out of money and she would send their steward Yabda Palag [Tib. yab mda' pa lags] with her apron and chuba which cost about 100 srang [as pawn] to borrow about 30 srang from the small shops. When she got the money from Kündeling, she repaid the money and also gave them a lot of gifts.

Q: Who took the possession of the estates after Trimön died?

A: After Trimön died, Kündeling didn't have the right to take possession completely.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said:] According to my understanding, didn't all the estates of Trimön completely belong to Kündeling? What happened to the son of Trimön? He might have gotten some share since he had the house, right?

A: I don't have anything detailed to tell you about this. However, after the two Kungös died [Trimön and his wife], Kündeling didn't get to take possession of the estate completely. Probably, it was offered to him only for during his lifetime. There were two sons of Trimön. We were schoolmates. One was called Loten [Tib. blo bstan] La and the other was called Gyentsen [Tib. rgyal mtshan] la. Gyentsen La worked as the manager (chandzö) of a monastery in Nyen [Tib. gnyan] and he died first.

Q: For example, Surkhang had many estates. When Surkhang Kalön's younger sister went to Rongdrag [Tib. rong brag] as a bride, if Surkhang thought of giving her an estate because they had many estates, did they have the authority to do that?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: Did they have to ask the government?

A: Probably not because Shatra [Tib. bshad sgra] had done the same thing. The Shatra family underwent fission. Shatra Gandan Panjor [Tib. dga' ldan dpal 'byor] and [the daughter] Lhayönla separated and filed a lawsuit. I saw the documents in the archives. Lhayönla was the mother of Chapa Södrön la [Tib. cha pa bsod sgron]. Probably, Gandan Panjor and Lhayönla were brothers and sisters from the same parents, but they didn't get along well.

They divided the estates at the time of the Reting [Tib. rwa sgren]. At that time, I was a child, but I knew that the backer of Lhayönla was a trader from Ga [Tib. sga] called Tsongpön Dündrül [Tib. tshong dpon bdud 'dul] who was a favorite [Tib. spyen bsal] of (the Regent) Reting. I used to stay in his house when I was going to the school.

Q: What was that lawsuit for?

A: It was about dividing the estates.

Q: How many estates did they divide to each party?

A: Both of the parties were saying that they wanted more of the estates. Later, they appealed to the local (Tibetan) government and they divided (the estates) almost equally. The names of the estates and the numbers of the dön were mentioned in the document. Gandan Panjor became the main Shatra family and he got a little bit more of the estates, and the other party became the surpa [Tib. zur pa], or the secondary branch of the family, and they got a little bit less of the estates.

In the early times, I heard that Shasur [Tib. bshad zur] [the Kalön] also used to be from Shatra and later he also became a secondary branch of Shatra. He was given estates like the Lhadong Shenkha estate [Tib. lha gdong shan kha]. Later, Lhayön La also followed this path and became a secondary branch of Shadra. At that time, they reported to the Kashag and the Kashag issued the verdict [Tib. dpyad mtshams].

Q: At that time, some of the Khampa traders became rich and famous like Panda [Tib. spom mda'] and Sandu [Tib. sa 'du]. Did they have estates?

A: No, they didn't.

Q: I think that they had the money to buy an estate, right?

A: Yes, you ask a good question. If the aristocrats had been allowed to sell their estates, they would have sold them to those people. But they didn't.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said:] According to what I heard, Sandu Rinchen became a lay official. The Local Government was saying the aristocracy was inherited and they had to have land (estate). This was the main principle of the feudal system. But Sandu Rinchen became an aristocrat, so I am not sure what kind of name he took. Panda Yarphel [Tib. spom mda' yar 'phel] also became a Kudrak. Actually, they were just traders.

A: That's right, they were indeed traders.

Q: Did they have estates?

A: Panda Yarphel was given the title of Kudrak as an award [Tib. gzigs bzos] for working as the Tibetan Government's Trader [Tib. gzhung tshong]. The government received great profit [from his work]. Panda also made quite a good accounting [Tib. rtsis rgyag] to the government.

Q: After they became government officials, were their children allowed to become government officials?

A: No, they were not allowed.

Q: Did the sons of Panda like Jigme [Tib. 'jig med] become government officials?

A: Probably not. I didn't hear about that. Jigme was the son of Pomda Topgye [Tib. stobs rgyas].

Q: Sandu Rinchen became a real lay official, how did it happen?

A: His wife was something in Reting Labrang.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said:] She might be related to Reting and probably they had an estate, right? I heard he should have the name of an estate to become a Kudrak.

A: Yes, at least they had to have that. Dzasa Gyatag was also a monk official in the beginning. Later, in order to inherit, he asked for an estate called Gyatag and took its name. He didn't succeed in having a son, otherwise, he was allowed to have his son become a government official. I didn't hear that Sandu Rinchen had an estate, but he had a very good backer in the Reting Labrang and became a real lay official.

Q: Actually, they had to have an inheritance to become a government official.

Q: The Yabshi [Tib. yab gzhis] were always like this.

Q: The Yabshi, the families of the Dalai Lamas, were special and became the first class aristocrats .

A: That was special.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said:] According to the Tibetan system, the aristocrats had estates along with the miser to work on them. The miser were not allowed to leave [the estate] even if they didn't want to work. But people like you are kind of new. Actually, you [refers to Setrong] belonged to the miser, but you had lands and also people to work on it and they were kind of your miser, so how did that come about? Were you given a special kind of authority? Or could some of the rich shungyupa households also do that? Tell me about this system.

A: You said something very profound. The local (Tibetan) government had been imposing taxes from the early times and they made some basic land enumeration documents [Tib. rtsa 'dzin yig cha] called Shibshung [Tib. zhib gzhung] that specified how the taxes would be imposed. But they were unable to make an overall document to be used throughout all of Tibet. They just made some partial documents and imposed taxes. These taxes were imposed too much and miser (families) became extinct.

In 1830, the Iron-Tiger Year, they made the land enumeration called the "The land Enumeration of the Iron-Tiger Year" [Tib. lcags stag zhib gzhung]. The 9th, 10th and the 11th Dalai Lamas didn't live long. The regent between the 9th and 10th Dalai Lama was Tsomönling [Tib. tshe smon gling]. The Iron-Tiger year was during that period and the land enumeration was made at that time. For example, at that time, my family was a well-to-do shungyupa household with one tregang of land. When the land enumeration of the Iron-Tiger Year was made, there were 5-6 shungyupa households like Pangpa and Sogdrong whose members had died and the family had become extinct [Tib. mi shi khyim stongs]. However, all of them didn't die, so there were a few miser who became like beggars and were wandering around not knowing where to go. They were unable to plant the fields and there was nobody working for the taxes.

When the land enumeration was made, our family was well-to-do but had only one tregang, so the government just attached the lands of the 4-5-6 extinct shungyupa households to our family. I remember going to burn incense in those ruined houses during the New Year and they told me that [the lands of] these ruins were attached to us. Like this, they attached the lands to the better household and also imposed the taxes on that household. Since the lands had not been planted for many years, so the land had become kind of white with dust [Tib. thal ba skya chags]. They just investigated the previous land enumeration and guessed that there might be this amount of land. That's how we had eight and one third tregang.

Actually at first we had about 13 tregang, but we gave one third to the secondary branch of our family when they got separated from us. At that time, they also gathered the people [the remaining people from the extinct families] and they were also given to us along with the land. In the Land enumeration of the Iron-Tiger Year, it said, "No matter whether you could handle the land or not,

you have to pay in-kind or in work for this amount of taxes." All the land enumerations were kept in the archives.

Q: Did they mention in the land enumeration document that you were given the people along with the lands?

A: Yes, it was mentioned that all of the remaining lands and the people were given to us.

Q: Those people belonged to the government, right?

A: Yes.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said:] Otherwise, if they had belonged to the monasteries or the aristocrats, they wouldn't agree to that. Is it like nowadays when small factories get merged into bigger factories?

A: Yes, it was something like that. At the time of the Iron-Tiger land enumeration, there were households like us who had capable people at home so we got land and miser. So we were able to work for the taxes and we also became a rich and big household. But some of them were unable to manage themselves.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said:] In the past, people used to say, "There was Setrong Yume [Tib. gser grong g.yu smad] in the upper part of the valley and there was the Kyarpo Ayar [Tib. skyar po a yar] in the lower part of the valley. The two of you were considered to be the two big households in that area. However, did Kyarpo Ayar become rich also from the Iron-Tiger land enumeration?

A: Yes, it was related to that.

Q: Did it happen the same as for you?

A: Probably, but I don't have any details to tell you about that. You can just find out about this in the Iron-Tiger land enumeration document. Kyarpo Ayar was a very big household. Later, they took a bridegroom who was related to Dombor [Tib. gdong por].

I told you there were four types of tax exemptions. The second exemption was the Magchag [Tib. dmag chag], the military tax exemption. It was called the Gyajong Magchag [Tib. rgya sbyong dmag chag]. The third exemption was called Tongnying Trüchag [Tib. stongs rnying bkrus chag].

Q: What does Trüchag mean?

A: The Local (Tibetan) Government enumerated the land (fields) very thoroughly when they made the Iron-Tiger land enumeration, but there were some places where they were unable to enumerate them because it [the fields] had become extinct [not in use] [Tib. stongs] long, long ago. [The people who said the land was extinct] had to take an oath that this was true. They swore it was true by washing a statue and drinking the water used for washing the statue. They were trusted because they drank the water used for washing the statue.

The fourth exemption was the Iron-Hare land enumeration note [Tib. lcags yos zhib mchan]. This was a reinvestigation done in the year after the Iron-Tiger Year, [and changes] were made as a note to the Iron-Tiger Enumeration. Not only this, they also made similar notes even after that. These notes indicate corrections for some wrong enumerations that were done in the Iron-Tiger Year. These were the corrections.

Q: Tashi Tsering said:] Regarding the relationship between the miser and the aristocratic and religious estates, it was not that the miser didn't have any rights. If the miser did the taxes, the lord was not allowed to expel the miser and the miser could inherit their lands for their children. At that time, one of the rights of the lord was that they could take mibo [Tib. mi bogs] or human lease fees from the miser. Those miser were allowed to go anywhere. There was also a system called mitröl [Tib. mi 'khrol], which was a kind of giving permission to a miser to leave the serf owner. I also heard that there was something called Mije [Tib. mi brjes] which involved exchanging miser. Tell me about the authority and rights of both the serf owners and the miser?

A: As you said, when the miser who belonged to the government and the aristocratic and religious estates [Tib. gzhung sger chos gsum] got married with a miser who belonged to a different serf owner they could request from their own serf owner to grant them permission to pay the mibo (human lease) fee to them. If the serf owner agreed to that, they had to pay a yearly mibo fee and then they were allowed to go wherever they wanted to go.

As for the mitröl, it was mainly for the "religious release" (chödrö) when they needed to make their children monks. Some of the miser who were related to the serf owners requested that the serf owner give permission for the boy to leave the serf owner (to join the monastery). They gave them this permission. This was among the shungyupa. As for the miser who belonged to the aristocrats and the monasteries, it was a little bit difficult to get that.

At that time, when they gave the chödrö permission, the aristocratic and monastic estates had their land tenure document [Tib. bka' gtan] in which it was written that if the monk would lose his celibacy he will belong [revert back] to the previous serf owner. This was called Kyatsa Rangdag [Tib. skya rtsa rang bdag]. The shungyupa households didn't have such land tenure documents.

Q: Was it also the same for the nuns?

A: Yes.

Q: Didn't the aristocrats give servants or maidservants to each other?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they actually given?

A: Yes.

Q: How did they give them?

A: Phala had an estate in Kunbumthang [Tib. sku 'bum thang] called Drebu Yulkha [Tib. 'bras bu g.yul kha]. The work overseer [Tib. las dpon] of that estate was a bearded man who had a son called Tsedor [Tib. tshe rdor] who acted the part of King Songtsen Gambo [in the opera]. Phala Drönyerchemmo gave Tsedor to Tseja Gyentsen la [Tib. rgyal mtshan lags] as his servant.

A: There were a lot of such things.

Q: Tell me about this authority.

A: Actually, we never gave our miser to anyone. If we did give one of our miser to someone, we would still have to work for the taxes, so the local (Tibetan) government would not inquire about that.

Q: You had the full authority to give your miser, right?

A: Yes, because we did the taxes. There is no question about aristocrats having had that authority. There were also some miser who were given as repayment for a loan. There was a shungyupa household called Bogchung living below the hot spring of Tülung. They had a maid servant. Probably, she was paying some kind of human lease mibo [to her original lord]. She also used to work for us sometimes. At that time, the shungyupa called Bogchung told their maidservant, "We owe 40 khe of barley to Namgyal Tratsang [Tib. nam rgyal grwa tshang] so you should go ahead [and become their servant as repayment of this 40 khe debt]." So I told her that I will pay the loan to the Namgyal Tratsang and the maid-servant and daughter would then belong to me as my trenyog [Tib. bran g.yog] [permanent servant].

Q: What was the origin of the people who were given? They were not treba, right?

A: They were originally nangsen [household servants].

Q: Tell me about the [category] nangsen in detail? They didn't have land, right?

A: No, they didn't have land.

Q: How did they become a nangsen?

A: When the parents of a household died and there were just some orphans left, we didn't have any choice but to raise them because they belonged to us. So they became our nangsen.

Sometimes, if some of the brothers in a family didn't get along well, some of the brothers told us that they couldn't get along well in their family so they wanted to become our nangsen. Our family also had this kind of nangsen.

Also, sometimes there were just wanderers or people who had run away from other places. They lived in our area as a düjung for a while and if they were unable to manage their livelihood like that, they would request some household to keep them as servants [Tib. g.yog po]. They became nangsen.

Q: Actually, nangsen and servants were the same, right?

A: Yes. But during the reforms, they made some new rules and said that the nangsen were the worst category of serf-servant (Tib. trenyog) because they didn't have freedom over their own bodies and they didn't have enough food to eat. It is possible that some of the masters didn't give them enough food, but we were paying 18 khe of barley per year to the nangsen. It is impossible that this amount of tsamba would not be enough to live on. They even had some surplus that they used to sell and buy some clothing. We also gave them a set of clothes per year.

Q: According to my understanding, there was one difference between the nangsen and the servant. You can hire a servant and give him salary. But were the nangsen like trenyog in the sense that the children of nangsen also become nangsen from generation to generation?

A: It is possible that some of the children of the nangsen also became nangsen, but there wasn't any rule that their children had to become a nangsen. When they got married and had children, they were allowed to leave and settle as düjung and live separately.

Q: Were you allowed to say that nangsen are not allowed to settle as düjung?

A: It was inconvenient for the master to have them stay in the household with the children because if both of the parents had to go out to work, who will take care of the children? Therefore, it is better for the masters to let them settle in their own household. Another thing was that the salary was paid only for the parents. So how could they manage the grain for their children? In our household, we used to pay 3-4 khe of barley for the children, but, there could be some households who didn't pay that.

Q: I think there were difference between the trenyog and the servants because the people working only during the autumn could get some wages and they could leave after that according to their own wish. So what was the difference between the trenyog and servants [Tib. g.yog po]?

A: This was no difference between the trenyog and the servants. The difference was between hired persons [Tib. gla pa] and trenyog. People working for the spring and autumn seasons came from outside and requested to work during the autumn. We had

to pay them 3-4 khe of barley. Those were just hired hands. It was like the saying, "The servant's bedding is above the stairs and the bagthub soup is in the pot" [Tib. g.yog po'i nyal chas skas 'dzegs 'go la yod/ thug pa bag thug khog ma'i nang la yod]. This means they were hired people who go back at the time of the Ngamchö holiday [Tib. Inga mchod], the Death Anniversary of the Tsongkapa on the 25th of 10th Tibetan month. At this time people used to eat bagthug soup. At that time, they were paid their wages and sent back as they were only hired people. The trenyog, however, belonged to us so we didn't need to pay any wages to them.

Q: Trenyog were one's own miser, right?

A: Yes. They became our miser because we performed the taxes imposed by the local (Tibetan) government. Therefore, they belonged to us. Lhalu [Tib. lha klu] offered a young man called Kelsang [Tib. skal bzang] who had good skills as a tailor to the Kalön Lama Tempa Jamyang [Tib. bka' blon bla ma bstan pa 'jam dbyangs].

Q: Was he a nangsen or was he paying human lease mibo?

A: I am not sure about that. But anyway, he belonged to Lhalu and Lhalu taught him tailoring and they had kept him as their trenyog. They thought they should offer a useful person, so So they offered him. He was 22-23, about my age, at that time.

Shatra Gandan Paljor also offered a good cook to the Kalön Lama. He was nicknamed, "Fat cook" but his real name was Lodrö [Tib. blo gros]. He is still alive. He was the cook of Tülung [Tib. stod lung] County after the reforma. The Kalön Lama being a monk, didn't have many miser to summlon to be his servants.

Q: At that time, when you got a loan repaid by giving a miser, did you sign a kind of document with the previous serf owner?

A: Yes. That was was called tröndzin [Tib. 'khrol 'dzin]. It was written that they gave me the miser.

Q: What wording did they write in the tröndzin?

A: For example, it was written like this: "From now on we have offered Shatra's miser Lodrö to Tempa Jamyang. Therefore, I am issuing a tröndzin on this month and date" [Tib. da nas bzung bshad sgra'i mi ser blo gros bstan pa 'jam dbyangs la phul ba'i 'khrol 'dzin du/ zla tshes la].

Q: Would they hand this to the miser or you?

A: Normally, they would hand it over to the person to whom the miser was given. For example, I would take the person to Tempa Jamyang and at the same time hand over the tröndzin to him.

Q: Would the miser's children also belong to the person to whom they were given?

A: Yes. In case the person who gave away the miser [later would] says that their children belonged to him, the person to whom the miser was given will show the tröndzin. So they won't have anything to say and they also couldn't file a lawsuit.

Q: Did you also get a tröndzin for the miser you got when you paid the 40 khe of the loan?

A: I didn't take a tröndzin for that. We just verbally agreed to that. I paid the loan and the serf owner said that you can take the possession of that woman.

Q: Did her daughter also become your miser?

A: Yes, she did. And her daughter would also belong to me.

Q: Did you have the custom where you could give one of the sons of your own miser to somebody else? Did you have the authority to do that?

A: It was not so convenient to do that because if the parents didn't agree to that, we couldn't force them and say that we are going to give your son to somebody else.

Q: Were you allowed to do that?

A: It was kind of allowed, but since he was a human being, if you gave him to somebody and if he ran away it would be very bad.

Q: There were many people who ran away, right?

A: Yes. There was the Agriculture Office (Tib. Sonam Lekhung [Tib. so nam las khungs]) in the Tibetan Government and some people said that it was similar to the present Agriculture and Husbandry Bureau [Ch. nong mu ju]. But actually it was not similar at all. It was also called Misö Lekhung [Tib. mi so'i las khungs] which was the one in charge of the miser and agriculture, but actually, they took the possession of the fields that were left unplanted although they could be planted [i.e., that were still fertile land].

They also took the possession of the people who came from Kham and Tsang who didn't have a particular serf owner [Tib. dpon po] or the serf owner didn't inquire about them. At that time, if a person came from Tsang to Ü [Tib. dbus], they [the serf owner] wouldn't be able to inquire about them. When [the runaway] they were asked, "Who is your serf owner?" They will say, "I don't have a serf owner." This was because they had ran away from somewhere, so it was not convenient for them to tell who their serf owner was. They were afraid of inquiry being made and being caught. So, they would always tell a lie and say that they were from some other place. The Agriculture Office took the possession of the people who didn't have a serf owner. They were not in charge of the Tibet's Agriculture and Animal Husbandry.

Q: There were a lot of people who were said to have surrendered to the Dzöbug [Tib. mdzod sbug] Treasury (which was the Inner Treasury of the Dalai Lama). Were those people who had previously belonged to aristocrats, monasteries and also to the government?

A: It seemed kind of convenient to surrender [to them], because the Dzöbug was the direct treasury of the Dalai Lama and nobody could do anything against that. But that office would not accept the surrender. One had to have a certain reason for surrendering [to them]. So there were just a few people who got accepted. If the miser had a certain serf owner and the serf owner would come and tell their certain reasons from their side, the person who accepted the surrender would have problem and it would become illegal.

Q: In the old society, did they use the term trenyog? Or was it a new term in the era of the revolution?

A: This was an old term. It was called yogpo (servant).

Q: Wasn't trenyog a new term that became popular in the revolution era?

A: No, it wasn't. I saw the term trenyog used in very old documents.

Q: If the term trenyog was an old word, in the old society, did they call trenyog for the treba? For example, there were the treba, the düjung, and the nangsen, so was this term trenyog used for all of these people?

A: This is a question asked by a person who knows about those things. Each of them had their name. For example, they will say, "I am a treba. I am not a trenyog."

Q: What about düjung?

A: They would also say, "I am not their trenyog, because I am just working for them as a düjung and I am a hired person get wages for the work."

Q: If this is the case, the nangsen like the servants, the maidservants, and the babysitters of the aristocrats were also trenyog, right?

A: The nangsen were indeed the trenyog. If you say miser, they were also trenyog.

Q: But they were a different kind of trenyog, right?

A: Yes.

Q: So trenyog goes for everybody in general, but in reality, when you talk about people, they only use it for the nangsen, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Actually, there was the term trenyog in the old society, but it was not as widely used as it was in the new society, right?

A: Yes. At that time [in the old society], they call them yogpo.

Q: What was the difference between the nangsen and the yogpo and yogmo? Did they call the servants and maid servants of the aristocrats nangsen?

A: In general, they were nangsen.

Q: [Tashi Tsering said] The servants who worked in the aristocratic households were not called nangsen. They were called Simpönla [Tib. gzim dpon lags], or personal servants. But actually, they were nangsen, right?

A: Yes. When many people gathered together they will say, "I am the shabchi [Tib. zhabs phyi] (personal servant) of Surkhang. I am not a trenyog of somebody else." They were regarded as a little bit higher.

Q: So according to the new [post-reform] system, they were considered high ranking servants [Ch. ago hi bong ren], right?

A: Yes.

Q: Kujar Phüntola [Tib. sku bcar phun tshogs lags] said that he was the servant of Kujar Künphella. Actually, he was half a servant and half a family member. So this new government called him a high ranking servant.

A: For example, the miser had to show great respect and take off their hats when they see the chandzö [servant who worked as the manager for the lord], but when they meet the Kungö [the lord] they were also one of the nangsen [had to act like his servant].

Q: So you probably could say that all those family servants were a kind of nangsen, but there were higher and lower ones, right?

A: Yes.

Q: There seemed to be three general types or levels [Tib. rim pa] of miser, maybe there were more. One was the treba and the next was the kind of düjung, under that it was the nangsen, Were there any other types?

A: That's right.

Q: What were the levels?

A: If we call it levels, it was kind of complicated because there weren't any fixed levels. But yes there were three types.

Q: What was the highest type? Was it the treba?

A: It was something like that. The treba would say, "I am a permanent treba. I am not a person who ran away from another places and was kind of a düjung." They were saying that even if they were in a very difficult [economic] conditions and they couldn't go to other places. There wasn't any difference of high and low level.

In general, the system of the religious and political combined political system had become a very special one.

Q: In terms of taxes, did the estates that belonged to the aristocrats and religious entities have the same kind of taxes?

A: They were kind of the same. As I mentioned before, the aristocrats had the tax unit for land called dön while the shungyupa had the gang. The miser on the religious estates were also given an appropriate amount of lands and were then required to perform accordingly the corvée work for the taxes. The taxes were divided between each household, so each of them had to work on a small portion of the taxes. The miser who belonged to the monasteries had a very hard time.

In general, under the system of religious and politics combined, the religious estates were regarded very highly. At that time in the old society, there were 7 high status institutions [Tib. che btsan bdun]: Sera, Drepung and Gandan, Gyüdra Tömei nyi [Tib. rgyud grwa stod smad gnyis], Namgyal Tratsang [Tib. nam rgyal grwa tshang] and Nechung [Tib. gnas chung]. Almost all of the small monasteries in Tibet were belonged to these 7 monastic institutions.

Q: Did the estates that belonged to the aristocrats and religious entities have to do the chitre?

A: Yes, they had to. If they had two gang, they had to work for the chitre for only one gang. They had to work half of the taxes for it. The aristocrats and monasteries had the dön tax unit and we, the shungyupas, had the gang.

Q: Were the taxes for the dön and the gang the same?

A: When the 13th Dalai Lama recruited the soldiers for the Gyena [Tib. bgyad sna] Regiment, it was said that dön and gang were equal [Tib. rkang 'don 'dra mnyam]. The aristocrats had to provide one soldier for 4 dön and the shungyupa had to send one soldier for 8 gang. So it became the same. Otherwise, the gerpa and monasteries had to work only half of the taxes.

The aristocrats also had more exemptions. In the old society when the renovation of the Jokhang took place and they newly built the Surchong [Tib. zur 'phyong] (the corner room of the house with windows on both sides on the courtyard) [Tib. 'khyam ra] and also the rooms of the Dalai Lama, they imposed a tax on tamarisk which was used for the red top of those rooms [Tib. spen bad]. It was written in the edict for imposing the tax, that "Half the amount of tamarisk taxes would be exempted for the 4 types of tax exemptions and the 7 high status institutes." Except for those, all the shungyupa households had to deliver 200 loads of tamarisk that were lengthwise 3 tsets [Ch. chi zi] [one tset = 1/3 meter] before some fixed date. This will be used for the room of the Dalai Lama and it is very important.

At that time, we reported that we don't have any tamarisk in the area, so we didn't need to deliver that. This was kind of a new tax imposed all of a sudden.

Q: How did the nomads [pay taxes]?

A: They had a calculation called gotsi [Tib. mgo rtsis] (head count). They used to count the animals once every 3 years and 20 animals were counted as 1 go [Tib. mgo] unit.

Q: Was this the system for the nomads in your place?

A: This was the system in the north.

Q: The Labrang [Tib. bla brang] and the Tratsangs (Monastic Colleges) used the system called Kyeme Chime [Tib. skyed med 'chi med]. It was a tradition of leasing animals where the return payment of butter was fixed regardless of the increase or the decrease in the amount of the leased animals. This was a different kind, right?

A: The Kyeme Chime was not regarded as a tax, though it was a kind of tax. They just fixed 2 khe of butter for each female yak per year regardless of whether the female yak would give birth to a calf or if they would die.

From the early times, the Laja had leased 20 female yaks to some well-to-do families like us. This was for the butter to be used for the Mönlam [Tib. smon lam] Prayer Festival. So we had to deliver 40 khe of butter every year [regardless of whether there were many more female yaks now or if all had died].

Q: This was not a kind of tax. It was a kind of loaning the use of the animals and collecting the interest every year, right?

A: No. That was called the Shey [Tib. she] or the animal husbandry lease. I could also lease my female yaks to other nomads. If both sides agreed to that, we would agree to lease them according to the system of Kyeyö Chiyö [Tib. skyed yod 'chi yod]. In this system, the butter was paid according to the increases and decreases of the animals. Usually, Kyeme Chime was done by the government.

When we leased yaks in that way, in summer we would go to see how many calves were born. Supposing 5 female yaks gave

birth to calves, then we would collect 2 and half khe of butter per year as the lease [from each yak] and we would give 2 khe of butter for the female yaks that gave birth in the previous year. If they didn't give birth, they didn't need to pay anything. We would seal the horn of the newborns and count how many four year old [Tib. so gnyis] calves and how many six year old calves their were [Tib. so bzhi], and how many yak babies [Tib. ya ru] there were. When the animals died, they would have to show the seal on the horn.

Q: Were there any other Gotsi other than the system of the Kyeme Chime? In the nomad areas in Tö, there was a system of markhe where 13 yak were counted as one markhe and they had to pay butter and skins and that stuff based on that. They were taxpayer miser and they were not allowed to go to other places, and they [their lord] had the authority to find and return people who ran away. This was called Mitsa Yonggug [Tib. mi rtsa yong 'gugs].

A: Yes, the local (Tibetan) government had given a land tenure document for the Mitsa Yonggug allowing them to retrieve people.

Q: Was that given to the aristocratic and religious estates?

A: Yes.

Q: But in the nomad area where I did my research, they didn't have the Kyeme Chime. Their serf owner [Tib. dpon] was Tashilhunpo Labrang and they did the gotsi census like the farmers and they collected the Leb [Tib. leb] once every three years. This was kind of paying the tax.

A: Yes, I saw in the old documents mention of the Lebtsi [Tib. leb rtsis] and in that the number of people were also counted. There were strange things. Generally, in the Nagchu area, gotsi was done once every 3 years to check the animals and to checking the newborn and death total of the animals. At that time, 20 yaks were counted as one gang.

Q: What I am not clear is, for example, that some of the nomads belonged to Gomang [Tib. sgo mang] Tratsang so they would do the Gotsi once every 3 years and the nomads have to pay the taxes like butter and skin to the Gomang. In addition to that, were there any system where they also had to pay the lease to another owner like, for example. the Sera Je [Tib. byes] because they Sera Je] had left say about 100 females yaks in the early times as the Kyeme Chime?

A: This was not a matter of whether there was such a custom or not. This depended on whether the nomads got somebody to lease them the animals.

Q: It was like investing, right?

A: Yes. So they won't lease the animals like this, because they won't get the lease back.

Q: I heard that sometimes it had happened 100-200 years ago. I had done some research on the Drepung Monastery and most of the research were done on the farmers. I knew something about the nomads though it was not so clear. I was not sure whether in the early times, somebody had invested animals and they were collecting the lease every year or whether it was a form of taxes that they have to pay in addition to the Kyeme Chime to their own serf owner? I don't know whether the nomads were real miser. This is what I am asking?

A: In the past, some of them were given the real female yaks and some of them were just given just a little bit money for that.

Q: Was that for buying the female yaks?

A: Yes. Yes, for example, for buying 20 female yaks they paid 50 sang for each female yak and made an agreement to pay 2 khe of butter from each animal per year. This was done because the nomads had a good herd of animals and quite a good number of workers. This was not called a tax. It was called the She, the lease agreeebt for the Kyeme Chime.

Q: Were there any other taxes imposed on the nomads in Nagchu area?

A: At that time, probably for the nomads in Nagchu and Tö it must be the same. When they did the lebtsi and gotsi, it was counted as one tregang for each 20 animals that belonged to the nomads themselves.

Q: They had to pay the tax for this to the government, right?

A: Yes. For this they had to pay taxes to the government. Otherwise they didn't need to pay taxes and they would say that Gomang has leased the animals using the Kyeme Chime system so we have to pay 40 khe of butter.

Q: In the Tö area, I heard that even single people who didn't have animals still had to pay the money or butter to Labrang because of a head tax called Gotram [Tib. mgo tram].

A: That was the Lebtsi which was done on the people, They imposed some money taxes on the people who didn't have to pay the taxes.

Q: In the places where I did the research, they divided the pastures into units like counting the khe of seed in farm areas, but there they called it Markhe. Once every three years they would do the Lebtsi and count the animals and if my animals had increased I could get 2-3 [additional] Markhe of pastures. If the animals decreased, I will lose some pastures. This was the custom of the [Panchen Lama's] Labrang.

A: That is correct.